

22 JAN 1969

ROLE OF FLIGHT SURGEON

Monitor physical and mental health of air crew, particularly pilots.

It is known that many aircraft accidents are caused by pilot error. It is further a known fact that many of these errors arise from physical or mental problems within the pilot. There are many physical factors which can be causative factors such as eye problems, vertigo arising from middle ear infection, malarial chills, effects of diabetes, cardiac manifestations of many types, results of brain damage, changes in blood chemistries and components such as anemias, bowel disorders which can present as acute emergencies, etc. Most of the physical factors are turned up in good routine examinations; however, many conditions are not known and the physician must become aware of them as they occur by being ever present, alert and suspicious, and in contact with air crew so as to become alerted to day-to-day changes in the individuals. This does not mean that he can personally spot changes in hundreds of personnel but observation plus examining dispensary records, listening to conversations, checking with fellow doctors, etc.

There are many who believe that the majority of the problems arise in the mental area. To begin with even those physically ill may have as their presenting or initial complaint tension, nervousness, insomnia with resultant fatigue, changes in mood which affect flying habits. It is not always understood by non-medical people that all men, young or old, experienced

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or inexperienced, tough or soft, stupid or intelligent, greedy or altruistic, well motivated or otherwise, are subject to symptoms arising from tension. These symptoms are not a sign of weakness but are common to all mankind as one of the ways which he can handle the stresses of life. Symptoms representing tension manifestations provide the escape valve which allows man to function in a constantly hostile atmosphere and by hostile environment we do not only allude to flying factors, but affronts to his ego, frustrations in his necessity of being accepted and loved, problems in connection with his emotional adjustment in early life often associated with parents, siblings and peers. Men automatically utilize many of the various physical and psychological mechanisms to enable them to get by but not infrequently these defenses begin to fail and it is here that a doctor (Flight Surgeon) can detect early changes and be alerted that the normal functioning of his pilot is either threatened or is already being adversely affected.

Tension can produce many effects in a pilot. He can be preoccupied and go too quickly and inattentively over his check list, can forget to check the gasoline supply, become impatient with the tower operation and not pay proper heed to landing or takeoff instructions, he can impatiently get his gear up too fast, forget to transfer fuel, not monitor his instruments, have lapses in his navigation, by day dreaming and not react logically if an emergency arises, hastily and impatiently enter a landing pattern in the wrong altitude, be unaware of nearby aircraft, etc. Training, regulations and management can assist a man in avoiding troubles such as these but cannot prevent them. A man with tension problems should not

fly and the function of the doctor is to observe these manifestations and recommend that pilot be grounded either temporarily, permanently or whatever the situation demands.

Pilots in any and all categories are human beings and as such react first as any other humans. There are some, of course, who will make any effort to hide any problems from the doctors who determine his flying status but generally when a human experiences discomfort physically or mentally he will come to the doctor.

He will consult with the doctor, his flight surgeon, especially if that doctor is known to be sympathetic, fair, knowledgeable and a part of the team. He will probably not come to the doctor if he is cold and unapproachable, known to be an immediate reporter of any transgressions he observes and does not have the respect of the local flying community.

We emphasize again that the role of the physician portrayed here is not intended in any way to interfere with the manager or his representative but rather to assist him in fulfilling his responsibilities.

In addition to the above, the Flight Surgeon should be acting as Public Health Officer which implies that he is looking at the total environment of his people: inspecting dining rooms and mess halls, cooks and mess attendants, bar glasses and bar boys, checking menus for nutrition. Encouraging use of mosquito netting in quarters if indicated. Inspecting for evidence of rats in Vietnam where Plague is prevalent. Checking the water supply to determine that it is safe and potable. Making antimalarial and salt pills available and enforcing their consumption.

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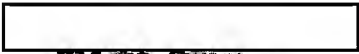
There is also another area where the doctor becomes involved which involves industrial health. This has relevance more in regard to larger maintenance bases but also to some degree any flight line. This involves concern for the noise factor which can and does cause deafness which has long-term legal ramifications, handling of poisonous chemicals used in degreasing, paint removing, etc, disposal of toxic water, proper eye protection for welders and those working around them.

The Flight Surgeon should be giving periodic talks on first aid. People forget what they have heard previously and need to be rebriefed occasionally. During these talks he can discuss many pertinent items such as alcohol, sleep, fatigue, his interest in their well being and readiness to listen to their problems.

As a private corporation which in the field has to depend for definitive medical care upon local indigenous or American military hospital facilities the question of liaison with these organizations is extremely important. First, there is the question of knowing what facilities are available and their locations, their capabilities (who has neurosurgeons, orthopedic surgeons) and their competence. Many times local regulations prohibit the treatment of certain types of individuals but can be easily circumvented by friendly personal relationships.

The Flight Surgeon is a staff officer for the manager. The manager would not ordinarily be aware of most of the above medical ramifications. A smart manager would rely heavily on the advice and guidance of his doctor and would find his services as valuable as he would wish to make it. A solid relationship between manager and doctor would greatly enhance any

operation from a safety, morale and managerial standpoint.


Flight Surgeon
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